

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through a cooperative effort of the APHIS Administrator's and Wildlife Services Deputy Administrator's offices a programmatic safety review of APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) was conducted during 2007-2008. Although program area specific safety reviews have been conducted previously, a comprehensive review was deemed appropriate after accidents in 2006 and 2007. Its focus was to evaluate the current safety program and identify improvements that can be made in WS activities to improve employee safety.

Nine WS operations program areas that present potential safety risks are included in this review: aviation, explosives and pyrotechnics, firearms, hazardous materials (chemical and biological), immobilization and euthanasia drugs, pesticides, vehicles, watercraft, and zoonotic diseases (diseases & parasites transmissible from wildlife to humans). Each program area was reviewed by subject-area experts from outside of APHIS.

For each program area, reviewers evaluated and reported on adequacy of written safety materials, effectiveness of safety program administration, training course materials, tracking systems for employee training and recertification requirements, and the program's safety culture. Accident records were reviewed and field inspections were conducted.

Reviewers stressed that some WS program areas have extremely well-designed safety programs in place that could serve as models for other agencies to follow. The well-managed aviation program was cited for an excellent training facility and high standards for pilot and crew certification. Within the explosives program area, long-standing outreach efforts to explosives industry experts have contributed to a well-developed safety program. Vehicle operators have a demonstrated low accident rate, and firearms users have a very low frequency-of-use/accident-rate ratio.

The reviewers suggested some safety improvements for multiple program areas, such as, the need for standardized training programs, and databases to track training and certification, drugs, and other hazardous materials. Other suggestions were more narrowly focused on specific program areas. Improvements specified include the need to: select a National Aviation Coordinator for the WS aviation program to ensure regulatory FAA compliance, which would require an aviator certified in at least one program aircraft; improve roadside safety for vehicle operators and communication ability for remote employees; stress the importance of employees partnering with co-workers when working with explosives; ensure local veterinary support when working with immobilization and euthanasia drugs; and maintain personal protection equipment and improve accident investigation procedures.

Overall, reviewers indicated that WS employees are cognizant of the often hazardous nature of their work and their responsibility to perform their duties safely. Implementation of a more formal and accountable nation-wide safety system and dedicated safety funding are highlighted as important ingredients in ensuring a safer environment for employees, stakeholders, and the public.